



# **SPORTS FUNDRAISING**

**DYNAMIC METHODS FOR SCHOOLS,  
UNIVERSITIES AND YOUTH SPORT  
ORGANIZATIONS**

**DAVID J. KELLEY**

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Dynamic Methods for Schools,  
Universities and Youth Sport  
Organizations

**David Kelley**



First published 2012  
by Routledge  
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada  
by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

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*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

Kelley, David J.

Sports fundraising : dynamic methods for schools, universities and youth sport organizations / edited by David Kelley. -- 1st ed.

p. cm.

1. Sports--Public relations. 2. Fund raising. 3. School sports--Finance. 4. College sports--Finance. I. Title.

GV714.K45 2012

659.2'9796--dc23

2011048985

ISBN: 978-0-415-50718-9 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-415-50719-6 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-0-203-12647-9 (ebk)

Typeset in Melior and Univers  
by Bookcraft Limited, Stroud, Gloucestershire



## **PREFACE: THE PRIMARY PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK**

This book was written primarily for students who are taking undergraduate and/or graduate coursework in Sport Management/Sport Administration programs or for those individuals who have been recently employed in interscholastic or intercollegiate athletic programs as practitioners. While it is nearly impossible to completely depict the body of knowledge that encompasses fundraising among all sports organizations in one book, *Sports Fundraising* is a collaborative and contemporary resource that addresses the need to provide creative, straightforward fundraising skills and guidelines coupled with ethical, intelligent application. Overall, those who read this book will be immersed into the exciting and challenging world of sports fundraising.

The primary purpose of this book is threefold. First is to provide both the student and practitioner the ability to identify and explain important principles, techniques, models, guidelines and specific challenges to effectively plan, communicate, implement and manage sports fundraising projects. Second is to develop the skills necessary to be a successful sports fundraiser through comprehending the various fundraising methods, models and principles by practicing the various application/skill building exercises throughout the book. The third purpose is to develop the ability to apply all of the practical knowledge in an ethical and professional manner.

Overall, merely reading this book will not make you a great sports fundraiser. As with learning any new skill, it takes practice. Finally, if the concepts and exercises in this book are taken in earnest, those individuals will be better equipped to create and manage significant revenue streams into their youth sport, interscholastic or intercollegiate athletic departments.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is dedicated to my wife, Tami, and our children Miranda and Sean, who have been supportive, open-minded and encouraging throughout the extensive hours of research and preparation for this book.

A very special acknowledgement goes to my parents Francis and Margaret Kelley. I cherish the eternal love and support you have provided me and want you both to know how much I appreciate it. For their unending love and support of my passion, I dedicate this book.

I would also like to acknowledge Bob Arkeilpane and Greg Stanley, both of whom were very generous with sharing their time, experience, ideas and insights on fundraising. I respect their perspectives and without them, this book would not have been possible to complete. I also want to thank M.B. Reilly, who was very accommodating and helped facilitate moving forward with this project, thank you. To Eric Horstman for his assistance with this project, Dr Joe Young for his professionalism and efforts as a reviewer and Dr Curt Laird for his personal and professional friendship in addition to his contributions as a reviewer, a special thank-you as well.

Finally, to my mentors, Dr Andrew Kreutzer and Professor Bob Brinkmeyer, your continued guidance, support and assistance in my career are greatly appreciated. Both of you exemplify and model the kind of professionalism I desire and as such, I value our relationship.

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# CHAPTER 1

## SPORTS FUNDRAISING: CHALLENGES AND PREREQUISITES

The purpose of this chapter is to focus attention to the youth sport, interscholastic and intercollegiate athletic domains. Additionally, an overview of the various challenges and contemporary dynamics faced by these organizations, relative to an ever-changing economic climate, will be examined.

### INTRODUCTION

Youth, interscholastic and intercollegiate sports are extremely popular in the United States. Commonly referred to as *Little League* and/or *Pee Wee Sports*, *High School Sports* or *Athletics*, and *College Sports* or *Athletics*, the popularity of this significant phenomenon is evidenced primarily in the participation rates as well as the increased televising of events. For example, The Walt Disney Company's ESPN Inc. created a channel devoted entirely to college sports. According to the ESPN website (n.d.) ESPNU came on the scene on 4 March 2005, and has grown to cover not only a multitude of college sports, but also youth and high school sports programming. In 2006, ESPN contracted with Little League Baseball to provide live televised coverage of the entire 32-game tournament for an eight-year period. Moreover, ESPN Inc. launched *ESPN RISE Magazine*, which has evolved into a multimedia phenomenon for the promotion of high school sports content across a wide variety of mediums and events. In August 2011, ESPN Inc. introduced *ESPN High School*, which made its television debut on the ESPN High School Football Kickoff, 26–28 August 2011. Simultaneous to this multimedia boom, interest and participation rates have continued to escalate among youth, high school and college athletic programs across the United States as well. Consequently, Kelley asserts, "It would appear that the monies needed to administer

these programs has not kept up with the growth of popularity in such programs and their participation rates” (2002, p.1).

Whether it is due to the inadequate budget allocations for athletics or the pressure to do more with less, fundraising has and will continue to be a challenge at all levels of competition. Therefore, program offerings and expansion is a reality and as such, seeking new revenue streams to aid in funding them is no longer just recommended, it is a required skill set that sport administrators must possess in today’s society. This book will aid in facilitating the appreciation and comprehension of fundraising at the youth, interscholastic and intercollegiate levels.

Unlike any other textbook on fundraising, the objective is not just to be read, understood and then filed away on a bookshelf. Rather, this textbook is a hands-on and skill acquisition resource that is intended to facilitate ongoing examination from both a practical and experimental perspective.

## **CHALLENGES AT THE YOUTH SPORT LEVEL**

Youth sport programs are very popular activities in the United States, as has been previously illustrated. Youth sport programs across the United States are usually organized by, for example:

- local community centers and recreation departments
- YMCAs and YWCAs
- private youth sports clubs
- nationally sponsored non-profit youth sport organizations
- Boys and Girls Clubs of America.

Significant amounts of research and empirical analysis into the problematic features of youth sport in terms of participation and dropout rates, commercialization issues, supervision and competency issues among volunteer coaches, and an over-emphasis on competition and winning over fundamental instruction and development are just a few examples of these areas of inquiry. Consequently, research has been lacking in the area of *youth sports fundraising* in comparison to the other areas. The contemporary dynamics and challenges of youth sport administration have heightened the need for fundraising. These dynamics include, but are not limited to, the following components:

- a lack of trained athletic administrators in the youth sport environment
- an over-reliance on school- and community-owned athletic facilities
- limited financial assistance from communities to support youth sport programs
- parental involvement as youth sport administrators and booster club representatives
- competition from other non-profit youth sport organizations and faith-based organizations
- competition from for-profit youth sport organizations.

In many instances, youth sport programs have a significant reliance, and in some cases a dependency, on city and/or community recreational facilities as well as city and/or community school district athletic facilities. The financial sources of paying for the use of these athletic facilities are largely from state government parks and recreation budget allocations, school district budget allocations, parents paying program fees, private donations and fundraising activities. The costs associated with operating athletic facilities in terms of maintenance, operational costs, custodial care of outdoor playing surfaces and gymnasiums are a significant reason why fundraising is necessary. There is a very alarming trend in youth sport administration, according to the National Alliance for Youth Sports, hereafter known as NAYS. They report “an estimated 70 percent of all youth sport programs are operated by parent-interest groups, which use public facilities that are provided through community tax dollars” (2011, p.7).

Youth sports provide many great opportunities for children to develop their sport skills as well as their socialization skills, among the myriad of other benefits of participation. However, because many youth sports programs are organized and financed by parent-interest groups, an unfortunate part of this arrangement has led to the physical and emotional turmoil of children. For example, NAYS (2011, p.7) explains that these youth sport leagues “are administered by adults, whose own motives, morals, and beliefs influence, to varying degrees, how the program is conducted.” For the most part, these are the same parents who are dissatisfied with community-based sport organizations such as YMCAs/YWCAs or Boys and Girls Clubs who have rules

and policies in place that ensure equal playing time in addition to positively enhancing children's physical, mental and social development. As a result, these parent-interest groups create their own leagues that have their own rules and regulations where the *best players* play, and the concept of equal playing time for every child is snubbed.

There is an ever-increasing *culture* of parents who, as spectators, ridicule game officials as well as take on the role of youth coaches. For the most part, they are untrained and/ or incompetent coaches. Consequently, they are competing for space in many community recreation centers and school district sport facilities across the United States. To make matters worse, budgets that previously allocated monies to parks and recreation have been cut drastically over the years as well as budget cuts to school district athletic programs. Therefore, as NAYS explains, "the perception that parents using public facilities are in some way an extension of the local program is often incorrect" (2011, p.7). On top of those issues, as time progresses, the cost of sports equipment, facility rental, uniforms are among a variety of programmatic costs that continue to escalate due to economic inflation.

The good news is that most of the millions of volunteers across the United States, who administer, coach and perhaps referee or umpire youth sports, do indeed have the best of intentions and are involved for the right reasons. However, first and foremost, the *lack of training* appears to be the common denominator that is afflicting youth sports. Much of the professional literature on youth sport focuses on the parent-interest groups that expose children to the physical and emotional risks and rightfully so. Moreover, when it comes to fundraising, the approaches implemented by these parent-interest groups are frequently unplanned, disorganized, and unoriginal.

Philosophically, the youth sport organizational structure is distorted and as such, needs professionally trained individuals to assume the roles that have been fulfilled by the parent-interest groups. NAYS is a non-profit organization that promotes the values and importance of sports and attempts to provide positive opportunities and experiences for children. They also provide training for volunteers and organizational administrators concerning the impact that sport has on the emotional, physical and social development of youth. In a document that they developed to help raise the standards of community youth sport programs and the detrimental behaviors plaguing youth sports,

they provide *education and accountability* standards for youth sport administrators. Educational topics that NAYS recommends include: “Philosophy of children’s sports, managing parents, managing volunteers, managing conflict, risk management and fund raising” (2011, p.26). As such, there is adequate evidence to suggest that the lack of financial resources combined with the lack of formalized training is tainting youth sports at all levels.

The current methods of fundraising in youth sport lack a proactive, organized, imaginative and mission-driven orientation. For the most part, youth sports fundraising has been characterized by parents and children pushing products such as merchant-discount coupon cards, pre-paid debit cards or some type of candy onto the community in an unorganized and in some cases, relentless manner. Typically, this creates aggravation for both the youth sport organization and community as a whole. Therefore, these types of fundraisers usually fall short of their intended goals and as a result, fundraising frustration develops.

In sum, those who read this book need to be open-minded to the possibilities and methodologies this book has to offer. Ultimately, this will aid in identifying and addressing significant fundraising obstacles by helping those who care about and are involved in youth sport.

## **CHALLENGES AT THE INTERSCHOLASTIC LEVEL**

In order to operate an efficient and effective athletic program at the interscholastic level, there are numerous reasons why fundraising is necessary. The four principal reasons are as follows:

- school district budgetary allocations for athletics are inadequate
- new technology within the sports equipment, facilities and sport surface industry that the school wants or needs to purchase
- the pressure to do more with less
- managing public perception of the athletic program.

First, school district budgetary allocations for athletics are inadequate. In many schools across the country, most budgetary allocations can range from two percent or less of the school district’s overall budget. In most instances, that two percent or less must be stretched

to cover the costs of the entire athletic program's expenses. The rising costs of various components ranging from purchasing sports equipment, contracting game officials, individual sport expenses to transportation costs and instructional/coaching salaries are just a few of the areas which that budget allocation covers.

Second, the contemporary dynamic of technological advances within the sports equipment, facilities and sport surface industries. For example, there are new artificial sports surfaces that are multi-purpose, versatile, and can withstand the wear and tear of numerous sporting activities compared to natural surfaces. While these new surfaces can prove to be cost-effective in the long-term, they are for the most part, very expensive. Additionally, even though the longevity of the surfaces is relatively unknown, most companies that install the product generally have an eight- to ten-year warranty and simultaneously promote the savings compared to natural grass surfaces. As a result, fundraising becomes an essential undertaking to cover the costs associated with any kind of technological innovation that an interscholastic athletic department considers significant.

The third challenge is the pressure to do more with less. For example, in many instances around the United States, the athletic facilities are outdated, old and/or too small. What was once appropriate in the 1970s or 1980s is now insufficient to accommodate the needs of the athletic program because of the changes in the number of athletic activities offered on account of enrollment patterns and participation rates based on student interest. As a result, athletic directors are forced to *do more with less* in terms of scheduling and managing athletic facilities that were constructed to reflect the enrollment patterns of the past twenty or thirty years.

According to the National Federation of State High School Athletic Associations, otherwise known as the NFHS, the data from their website is based on figures from the fifty state high school athletic/activity associations, plus those in the District of Columbia, that are members of the NFHS. Participation for the 2010–11 school year rose by 39,578 students to 7,667,955, compared to the 2009–10 High School Athletics Participation Survey conducted by the NFHS. An NFHS press release explains, “While the overall increase was not as much as we’ve seen in the past few years, we are definitely encouraged with these totals given the financial challenges facing our nation’s



high schools,' said Bob Gardner, NFHS Executive Director". Moreover, Gardner suggested in the press release that, "The benefits of education-based athletics at the high school level are well-documented, and we encourage communities throughout the nation to keep these doors of opportunity open" (2011, p.1). Based on these statistics, if the number of students participating in high school athletics in the United States continues at the rate displayed above, by 2015 the overall participation rate should be reasonably close to eight million student athletes. Consequently, it is anticipated that program offerings and expansion are a reality and this will ultimately lead to seeking new revenue streams to aid in funding them.

Finally, another challenging component to fundraising at the interscholastic level is the management of public perception. There are many supporters of athletic programs and there are also critics. In general, the critics can come from many disciplines, but when it comes to raising funds, conversations ultimately will gravitate toward whether or not *taxes* will come into play. In this instance, even the most highly organized and efficient fundraising campaign, which is only soliciting private donations for an interscholastic athletic department for a public school system, can potentially be weakened by unsubstantiated communication. Therefore, the prudent athletic administrator takes this into consideration as an anticipated challenge, if the fundraising initiative is to be carried out in an effective and efficient manner.

Overall, there are many other challenges facing interscholastic athletic programs across the United States relative to the costs associated with managing a program, such as pay-to-play initiatives, booster organizations, corporate sponsorships as well as a multitude of other fundraising techniques that will be covered throughout the book.

## CHALLENGES AT THE INTERCOLLEGIATE LEVEL

Intercollegiate and interscholastic athletic programs both share similar pressures outlined above, however, intercollegiate athletic programs and the fundraising activities they utilize are associated more as having dual elements of *return on investment strategies* such as contracted business arrangements with specific marketing and profit-making objectives as well as *philanthropy*, compared to